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Anne Garréta , Emma Ramadan (Translation)

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Not One Day begins with a maxim: “Not one day without a woman.” What follows is an intimate, erotic, and sometimes bitter recounting of loves and lovers past, breathtakingly written, exploring the interplay between memory, fantasy, and desire.

“For life is too short to submit to reading poorly written books and sleeping with women one does not love.”

Anne Garréta, author of the groundbreaking novel *Sphinx* (Deep Vellum, 2015), is a member of the renowned Oulipo literary group. *Not One Day* won the Prix Médicis in 2002, recognizing Garréta as an author “whose fame does not yet match their talent.”

Not One Day Details

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From Reader Review Not One Day for online ebook

John O'Neill says

excellent

Evelyne Fallows says

I can't say I liked this book but read it for my first French-American book club meeting in New York this evening. I read it in French and am curious to find out how the English version was perceived. The topic (sex, desire...) and writing style (Oulipian writing) are interesting but left me cold. Maybe I will have a different view after the book club discussion. Stay tuned (or not).

Jeff Bursey says

A brief memoir or confession recalling women the narrator has known, set out in an Oulipian restraint. Or is it something else entirely? The writing loops, swerves, and crackles. Translation by Emma Ramadan and Garréta. Longer review to come. Recommended.

Long review here:

<http://winnipegreview.com/2017/09/not...>

kasia says

Very sexy, very French. The narrator sets herself the task of daily free-writing about a different woman she has lusted after, and the results prove a lot more gorgeous and interesting than one might expect. An Afterword adds a dazzling layer of complexity, turning the whole into a fascinating reflection on form and fiction.

Bob Lopez says

Was not as into this as her previous book; this really came across as an exercise both in device and diction, this seemed wordy for the sake of wordiness and not for any other reason, and did not enhance my enjoyment of the book. Shame, but I'll definitely pick up her next.

Sonia Crites says

This book is an interesting exploration of desire. It's use of description is quite eloquent. This book is well written and thoughtful. You can tell the author is stretching herself by sharing.

Faiza Sattar says

★★★★? (4/5)

A non-fiction veiled fictitiously. Anne Garréta's stunning prose brings to life the mind of a writer, mired in an upheaval of a personal project where she intends to deliberate on past infatuations. We come across a myriad of unknown love interests, crushes, secret admirers and objects of affections; delve into the writers psyche of emotional attachments, value of arts and sentiments in life. The structure of prose is terse, given the writers Oulipian affiliations, which threads from one end to another often leaving massive blanks in the midst. These blanks are meant to be filled in by the reader, as suggested by the Afterword. In "Not One Day" Garréta manages to fuse fiction with truth so much so that the reader cannot decipher the two apart...and neither can the writer.

A selections of favourite passages from the book

- What's to be done with our inclinations? Why not write something different, differently than you usually do? Once more, but with a new twist, rid yourself of your self. Shed the accoutrements of this disentangling, keep at bay a little longer, if you can, who you think you are. Since you can no longer conceive of writing except in long and intricate constructions, isn't it time to go against the grain
- All we seem to do nowadays is tell and retell the stories of our lives
- Writing at the whim of memory twists and turns on uncertainty. Like desire itself, never assured of its end or its object
- From day to day, you would have had nothing to report: nothing ever happens to you except in remembering. You only grasp the moment in distant memory, once oblivion has given things, beings, events, the density that they never have in the broad evanescence of daylight
- In this regard, desire and pain are alike—your accident taught you this. Only when they take you by surprise do they get out of hand
- Memory of a body: inscribed in a given space, anchored in light
- You witnessed, powerless, motionless, your own colonization by an inexplicable and obscene desire that your willpower was failing to keep in check, to contain, to purge
- the calm of the night, the weightlessness of the air, the layers of light vacillating all around; the complicity brought on by long silences, solitude, altitude, the distant horizon?
- But here's the paradox: it's in fleeing before the invasion of material life, multiplying the exiles, the trips when you rejoiced at the thought of casting everything off, that you find yourself once more multiplying the constraints. You buy—for you wouldn't be able to resist the desire of a volume that promises flights of fancy or thought—books you can never resolve to leave behind

- We merely trade one blindness for another. For lack of the common blindness, we will let a singular lucidity blind us
- Here we go. We're floating together in the warm bath of self revelations and secrets disclosed in the fiction of hidden faces
- he had seen shores empty of inhabitants looking at seas empty of ships, and whose hosts, to ward off the anxiety of these infinite spaces they are too few to populate, strive to cover up under sprawling suburbs, distraught metropolises, shopping malls rolled out over acres and acres, a blanket of concrete, parking lots, ramps, bypasses, asphalt. Lay the foundation to cement our disappearance, quickly, for its grip, imminent, threatens
- The friendship had probably, from the start, been built on a basis of subtle desire, of a potential desire that good sense, affinity, tenderness had managed to tame, divert, shape into something else.
- The order of what ensued is vague. There is no time in your memory, nothing but places and between them passages that open only to close again
- There is no one to resuscitate, and it's because the memory is still alive that it resists autopsy and decimation over the course of a story.
- You should have suspected it at the first word written tonight. You should have, in rereading that correspondence a few months ago, understood it all. The dialect in which you wrote to each other is the dialect of all your loves: a chimera of French and English, strewn with bilingual wordplay, vertigos of language, trepidation over meaning
- You had forgotten that the point of this instruction was never to instill an affinity for the subject but to make it into a pure instrument of selection
- The mystery of her identity, the search for signs, the hermeneutic passion it inspired in you, made that semester of self-defense the most arousing erotic experience of your life. An eroticism that was all the more strange since it never managed to fasten itself or settle on any one body, but instead was bound to all of them, and because it was fluid, vacillating, drove you to pay to each of them an intense and infinite attention
- Friendship seems to you today the most difficult thing in the world. You attempt it, and almost always doubt its reality
- Our habits prompt our judgments more than our tastes do
- Ironic aporia of sovereignty: Mustn't we get down on our knees to ascend to the throne?
- As for writing every day or even every night, that was rather optimistic... Did you really bank on so easily curing yourself of your cardinal vice—procrastination?
- Generating randomness exceeds the forces of the human mind: it takes machines. The animal exudes sense and determination like it pisses, like it speaks, like it breathe
- Hadn't you taken care that these stories be abstract enough to prevent a positive identification of their subjects?

- But who's to say that your critique of desire isn't just another tool of its empire?
-

Janday says

This small book contains volumes. Garreta's response to reader desire transforms into a personal, but universal story of desire. There are so many ways to read this book: vignettes, one large story, alphabetically, chronologically. Each new reading is a revelation.

Jeffrey says

Not One Day is beautifully written, and is composed, basically, of two kinds of writing: memoir and flights of fancy. Garréta moves from engrossing story (a short interaction with a child, a night spent with a woman at a bar) to off-the-cuff philosophizing (the meaning of desire, the visual workings of memory), and often balances them well, placing a solid narrative detail at the end of a philosophical passage. I enjoyed reading this book—there are sections that I know I'll read again and cherish—but sometimes the point got away from both me and Garréta.

MJ Nicholls says

A charming confection from a lesser-known Oulipian rising to prominence on the world stage, thanks to Deep Vellum Press. Whip-smart (in the S&M sense), wryly hilarious, elegantly lyrical, and drolly observant, this novella makes a fine addition to the Oulipian canon.

Tay says

“We have an abundance of young youngsters and old youngsters of both sexes, ambitious, as naïve as they are cunning, in thrall to their own little bildungsroman. Channeling (often without knowing or else knowing too well) Corteggiano, apocryphal instructions of a baroque cardinal of yore.”

Jim Elkins says

A Blindness Brought on by Poststructural Theory

I found this book intensely annoying from the very first page.

Garreta is a member of Oulipo, and I understood from reviews that the book is experimental in an Oulipean sense. The reviews I read noted that she begins by setting out an Oulipean constraint, and then doesn't consistently follow it, which is a common Oulipean trait. Her subject is all the women she has loved or desired, and the self-imposed constraint is that she'll write about a different woman each day for the course of the project.

All that is common in Oulipean and other constrained writing, and I was curious to see how it played out here. She opens with an "Ante Scriptum," which begins with the dictum--common in poststructuralism, metafiction, and the Oulipo--that the project of writing is to "rid yourself of your self," meaning to demonstrate, in as many "intricate constructions" as possible, that the notion of the narrator is a fiction, and that the implied author is doubly so, that no self can be sleuthed behind the text. All these are commonplace beginnings.

What was annoying was the way she positions herself (the author and the author) and her readers on that first page. She adopts a mock condescension:

"You [i.e., I] don't have the heart to tell them [the "few readers"] that no subject ever expresses itself in any narration. And besides, they would refuse to believe this terrifying bit of news--we're still punch drunk on our little selves." (p. 3)

Notionally, the readers still posit Anne Garreta behind the texts signed in her name, and are still "drunk" enough on their vanities to go on desiring stories of desire. Bravely, she volunteers to put herself right in the center of the practices in which she has no belief:

"So you [i.e., I] have resolved... to pretend to step out onto the slippery slope that seems so natural these days and to subject yourself [myself, and my readers] to the discipline of confessional writing... You will play at a very old game that has become the hobbyhorse of a modernity balking at radical disenchantment: confession..." (pp. 3-4)

This is annoying because the pose here is that the author / narrator has entirely subscribed to "radical disenchantment," but she's going to "play" with the idea of narrating her desires, as if desires were the key to "our subjectivity," as if the narrator in the text that follows actually existed as a subject, not to mention a projection of the named author.

But this has to be entirely wrong. No reader I know, possibly excepting AI readers, is so thoroughly "disenchanted" that they do not see narrators as subjectivities, that they don't see representations of desire as attempts to elucidate subjectivity, that they don't understand narrators as intricately implicated with their authors. I like conceptual poetry as much--maybe after the fall of American conceptualism, more--as anyone, but I do not fit the portrait she paints so glibly and condescendingly.

For me, a first page like this one puts the author in question (and therefore also the narrator). I don't believe Garreta believes in the kind of disenchantment she claims. The truth has to be closer to what the reviewers have noted: this is a book about love and desire, and its degrees of fictionalization or constraint are not relevant to that fact. The reason Garreta sets rules for herself is to "play," as she says, but not in the way she intends it in the line I quoted. She's not "playing" by reconceptualizing old-fashioned narratives of desire as "intricate constructions." She's writing old-fashioned narratives of desire slightly deformed by playfully "intricate constructions."

I wrote all that before I read past the bottom of the second page. I thought it was important to register my absolute non-assent with regard to the opening voice of the book, and my possibly irreparable alienation from the narrative voice that the text so lightheartedly and "playfully" proposes. I am an alienated reader from the outset.

Now I've read the entire book: twelve stories about desire, love, and love affairs; and a "Post Scriptum" in which the author again speaks for herself.

The "Ante Scriptum" continues with a surprisingly long list of self-imposed rules. In my enumeration:

1. "Not one day without a woman" (that is: each day she'll write about one love affair)
2. Strict fidelity the "the unwinding of memory" (no artificial composition)
3. Five hours per day, "no more, no less"
4. Seven days a week
5. Written in the order in which they come to mind
6. No pen (the book ends by acknowledging the Apple Macintosh)
7. No drafts or notebooks
8. No other rules, nothing other than memory
9. No fiction ("nor will you reconstruct [events] as they might have happened," p. 5)

The twelve stories ("Nights": ten women, a girl, and a Pontiac Grand Am, which she loves because its name reminds her of "grande ame" and "grande dame") are well observed, nicely composed, and entirely conventional. It is difficult to imagine a reader who could keep the "Ante Scriptum" in mind while reading about seductions, drinking, and nightclubs. The only traces of the "Ante Scriptum" are the titles (for example "B*," "D*") and the square-bracketed "Night" number at the end of each "Night."

But my annoyance returned in full force in the "Post Scriptum," not because it begins by excusing the author's lapses from her various rules (that is obvious early on, and it's announced on the back cover), and not because she admits at least one of the twelve stories is a fiction (that does have consequences for how the book is read, as she notes) -- but because she returns to her idea of avoiding the fiction of subjectivity and "the idolatry of desire," and spends the last five pages on an unironic defense of her unavoidable complicity in the "empire" of desire. It turns out she remains serious about writing differently, not falling for the fiction of fiction's veracity or psychological truth, not being duped by the production of subjectivity -- and yet she thinks that the two framing essays are enough to call the twelve "Nights" into question. Regarding this most important rule, the essays have nothing to say to a reading of the "Nights."

What lack of self-awareness, what hypnosis brought on by a lifetime of literary theory, what confidence bolstered by uncritical praise, could produce this raw juxtaposition of poststructural theory and perfectly ordinary storytelling?

Lott says

(First of all: this book deserves more than 3 stars, at least 3.5). I rarely (never?) get to read about lesbians, and I recognise myself in so many parts of this book. My only "problem" with this book is the language, at times, but this could be due to the translator, not the author.

Tuck says

A non oulipo narrative by a "young" oulipo author detailing some of her loves, lusts, and lost connections. But haha the joke, on is so be sure and read the afterword. Prize winning translated from the French and

Jason says

A brief excerpted passage of Anne F. Garréta's prose forcefully commanded my interest earlier this month whilst reading Luc Sante's piece in the current *HARPER'S* on the Oulipo group and a new anthology of miscellany from writers operating under its banner. Fast forward: I have read two Garréta novels in two days and this is my second review. Oulipo. Ouvroir de littérature potentielle. Workshop of Potential Literature. The idea behind Oulipo was to consolidate a group of artists whose mandate was to use mathematical and other formula to generate literary compositions. As such, these potential literatures were literatures beholden to generative constraints. Garréta was the first woman ever invited to join Oulipo and the first member born after the group set up shop. Her debut novel, the fantastically accomplished *SPHINX*, which I read and reviewed yesterday, was published in 1986, before she was a member of Oulipo, but bears all the hallmarks of a fully-ratified contribution. *SPHINX* is engineered from a constraint that makes it both a groundbreaking work of queer literature and an impressive feat: it tells a love story to whose two central participants no gender is allocated, tricky to pull off especially in the original French, a language whose grammar is intricately gendered. *NOT ONE DAY* is a later work. A number of novels came between these two. I am especially interested in the one about a serial killer who preys on characters from Proust. *NOT ONE DAY* was written on "Apple Macintosh machines, July 19th 2000--November 19th 2001," specificities regarding the location and pockets of time in which it was composed central to its foundational set of constraints. It was published sixteen years after *SPHINX* and finds what I sensed to be a modality of wisdom hinted at in the earlier novel in full, resplendent flower. If *SPHINX* formulated an amorous relationship unmoored from fixed gender binaries but nonetheless imperiled by inflexible polarities of dominance and subjection, *NOT ONE DAY* reflects upon years and many lovers, elaborating a "rhetoric of desire," revealing an author who has found herself in variegated roles insofar as her couplings (and close calls) have been concerned, and who has come to possess a fairly untroubled grasp of the sublime tenuousness of human connection, inflamed by our drives. Both books made me think of Roland Barthes' *A LOVER'S DISCOURSE*, *SPHINX* in the passages where the author presents what I called in my review of that book a "profusion and enumeration of rites of amorous agony," *NOT ONE DAY* more comprehensively, presenting as it does a "stammering alphabet of desire." *NOT ONE DAY* also made me think of Chantal Akerman's 1982 film *TOUTE UNE NUIT*, a film depicting multiple fragmentary encounters between numerous pairs of lovers whose title it resembles. In the "Ante Scriptum" which prefaces *NOT ONE DAY*, the author lays out the contours of the project she has set for herself: she is to spend five hours on each brief section over a set span of time, not using notes or in any way preparing things in advance, working solely from memory and in-the-moment inspiration, in order to record reminiscences on either lovers, women she desired, or women who desired her. The sections are to be written in no proscribed order, merely as things come to her, the women depicted in each given a brief code name (E*, D*, Z*, etc.), the sections finally arranged alphabetically by name of corresponding female subject. The sections are named for the night they were written in the sequence of composition, but appear in a different order, hence the scrambled index at the front of the book. This chain of interlocking vignettes, uncovered from memory, consequently invoke philosopher Henri Bergson's concept of the perpetually modifying memory chain. Memory and desire are the central elements here, a fact repeatedly addressed explicitly: "Writing at the whim of memory twists and turns on uncertainty. Like desire itself, never assured of its end or its object." The ten sections of reminiscence are beautifully crafted and invigorating, filled to the brim with indelible, poignant, sometimes irreverent prose, such that endeavoring to quote them almost seems fruitless because ... where does one stop? One passage I love and would like to quote pertains to an inept seduction at the hands of a married nominally heterosexual female writer. Garréta riffs on the idea that "a novel is like a car: any amateur mechanic knows upon initial inspection the

type, its most common pathologies, and the structure of its engine. There are a few common models, a minuscule amount of rare ones that force you to revise your understanding, oblige you to dismantle them completely to understand their workings. We encounter more family sedans on the roads of literature than Ferraris or prototypes.” This ends up serving as prelude to her making love to the lady writer who is herself subsequently described as a kind of mechanical doll. What else is an Oulipo writer but a kind of sophisticated mechanic? Each section depicts a different kind of relationship with its own autonomous dynamic, precipitating its own species of ecstasy, deadlock, discovery, or indignity. One section has nothing to do with another woman, focusing on desire in relation to Garréta's love affair with American highways, which I can relate to as a Canadian who has his own abiding passion for the long distance North American drive (not to mention road movies). The whole book is written in the second person, Garréta writing about herself as "you," a tactic which situates her as analysand--“nothing but you and you playing against yourself—are you not your best adversary?—at the ancient and unreasonable game of analysis”--but also serves to create an intimate enmeshment with the reader, the other pertinent "you" in the scenario at hand. The subject is not a subject. Je est autre. Each of us is a whole population situated in assemblages of intertwined populations. "You" is a "reader, silent, who isn't even a person, at best the signifier of one...” The term Deleuze and Guattari used to designate the porous population that each of us constitutes is "haecceity," a beautiful word. There is no subject. There is desire and memory. We are not stretching things when we invoke Barthes, Henri Bergson, and Deleuze-Guattari. This is a literature steeped in theory, especially semiotics and hermeneutics, declarative as such. In the final section, "Post Scriptum," a sly Afterword that mischievously pulls rugs out from under us and jabs obstructions through our spokes, all the while riffing gloriously, we are almost certainly asked at one point to remember Bataille and are positively inarguably presented with Lacan's "object petit a," spelled out bluntly comme ça. "Post Scriptum" is the icing on the cake, a delectation. SPHINX was a work attuned to the lover's agonies and the torments of impossible attachment. NOT ONE DAY knows life, has lived in up and down and side to side, sometimes agile, sometimes endearingly clumsy, and it knows what a person needs to know: it's all gravy, worthy of devotional praise, because nothing is at stake, the beauty of it all being that nobody gets out alive. I like to think of myself as a man who has endured cataclysmic codependent dissolution and attained wisdom at the other end of travail. I remember my past lovers with the same dignified earnestness and puckish irony as does Garréta hers. Lamentation has become a dish only rarely served in my condo. I find nothing less attractive in others than self-pity. Why would I give myself special dispensation as regards indulgence in same? I either live a post-sex life or I am on hiatus. Literature and art are my earthly Valhalla. Post-sex? Well, I have been known to moderately appreciate the onanistic pleasures of pornography. I take from "Post Scriptum" that Garréta might not strictly approve of my occasional streaming of porn, but I know she would get it. Shrug. Desire is formidable in a body, like memory, persistent, it doesn't stop flowing until the blood does.
